



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Return of Uzbek Asylum Seekers in Kyrgyzstan

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 13, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States reiterates the serious concern it expressed on June 15th regarding the status of four Uzbek asylum seekers who fled into Kyrgyzstan from the city of Andijon in May 2005, and who thereafter requested asylum. Following an exhaustive investigation of the circumstances of their asylum claims, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) determined that all four individuals are "mandate" refugees, and has expressed publicly and repeatedly its willingness to resettle them in third countries. Nonetheless, these four men are in serious danger of being returned forcibly to Uzbekistan by the Government of Kyrgyzstan.

I was able to meet briefly with each of these four individuals in the detention center in the city of Osh during a recent visit I made to Kyrgyzstan. They seemed to be in relatively good health and receiving adequate care in their detention; the relevant authorities in Kyrgyzstan deserve appropriate credit for this.

In the summer of 2005, the Government of Kyrgyzstan demonstrated a strong determination to assist individuals who seek protection from persecution when it transferred 439 Uzbek asylum seekers to UNHCR for third-country resettlement. All but three persons from the original group have been resettled successfully in a variety of countries, including several OSCE participating States, and 266 of them now call the United States of America their home. Kyrgyzstan built significant good will and credibility with the international community through its principled stand at that time. The forced return to Uzbekistan of the four asylum seekers in Osh would do serious damage to this positive reputation.

The United States also calls on the Government of Kyrgyzstan to be mindful of its OSCE commitments reaffirming the importance of international standards and instruments on the protection of refugees. More than two dozen Uzbek asylum seekers that were returned forcibly to Uzbekistan from various countries in the past year were imprisoned immediately and no international observers have been allowed to visit them. We therefore urge the Government of Kyrgyzstan to once again demonstrate its willingness to assist individuals who seek protection from persecution by allowing UNHCR to resettle these four asylum seekers in third countries.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.